

Connecticut After School Network

Testimony to the Appropriations Committee Governor's Budget Proposal – SDE In Support of Funding for After School Programs

Submitted by Michelle Doucette Cunningham, Executive Director
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Good evening, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, Senator Maynard, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Michelle Doucette Cunningham, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut After School Network, a statewide alliance representing parents and providers across the state. The Network's goal is to have high quality, affordable after school programs available to every Connecticut child and youth so that they grow up safe, healthy, educated, connected and employable.

I am here tonight, on behalf of the After School Network and all its members, to urge you to restore full funding for after school programs. I am referring in particular to two line items in the State Department of Education budget that were cut drastically in the Governor's proposal: *After School Program*, currently funded at \$5,500,000, and *After School Enhancement*, currently funded at \$142,500. I appreciate the difficult situation you face in today's fiscal climate, but the current economic downturn only increases the need for after school programs that support working families and keep children safe.

After School Program Facts:

- The After School Grant Program currently serves more than **7,000 kids** grades K-12 at 74 sites in **32 cities and towns** across Connecticut, from small rural communities to the state's largest cities.
- Currently \$5.5 million dollars is divided among 44 grants, but Governor Rell's proposed **90% cut** would leave only \$500,000, enough for only three or four grants.
- More than twice as many grant applications were submitted for this program than could be funded, showing that the need for this type of funding is great.
- The **average grant was \$120,000** per year – the maximum amount of each grant was \$150,000.
- The average program serves **120 students**, many serving more than one site in their community, at a cost to the state of approximately **\$1,000 per student**. Additional costs of the program are made up by parent fees (most use a sliding fee scale) and significant in-kind support from the school and community.
- After School programs funded by these grants employ approximately 675 staff in total, as well as providing thousands of working families with necessary child care.

- This is a competitive grant program that any nonprofit, school or municipality can apply for, unlike the federal 21st Century funding that is limited to only the poorest school systems. Community collaboration is a requirement for all grantees.

After School Enhancement Facts:

- The After School Enhancement funding of \$142,500 was awarded to the Connecticut After School Network through a competitive grant process. It supports infrastructure development and system capacity improvements through the provision of training and technical assistance to the 44 grantees supported by the After School Program (above).
- This funding helps site directors improve the quality of their programs, by using best practices and linking after school activities to the school-day curriculum. It also provides essential staff training and site visits, as well as support for the programs' use of an on-line data collection system to meet Results-Based Accountability data needs.
- Elimination of this funding, as proposed by the Governor, would have a significant negative impact on the Connecticut After School Network, which is a small, nonprofit organization, and would result in the loss of at least one of our five staff, and the reduction in hours of a second person.

Why After School is Important:

- Families are relying even more on afterschool supports as they work to keep their jobs, take on more hours, or struggle to afford basic necessities for their children. Parents with afterschool care are more productive at work, less stressed about the welfare of their children, and consequently, miss fewer days of work. A growing number of families can no longer afford afterschool programs, or the cost to transport kids to programs.
- Children in afterschool programs do better in school, are more likely to graduate and are exploring pathways to new careers. Through hands-on learning, they are developing the critical thinking, leadership and problem solving skills that employers say are vital. Investing in afterschool programs now is a down payment on tomorrow's workforce, and a successful economy.
- Just when we need afterschool supports most, programs are being forced to reduce services, increase fees or even shut their doors. Many of these programs provide not only academic enrichment, but also breakfast, snacks and even a hot supper. It is imperative that these resources, relied on by so many, not only remain intact but can also be expanded to respond to growing demands when the economy improves.
- One in five Connecticut children are inadequately supervised after school, according to a survey of the parents of 853 children ages. One in seven children (14%) regularly spends time after school looking after him or herself, and another seven percent (7%) of the kids were watched by a sibling age 12 or younger. This translates to more than 80,000 Connecticut children.